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AN EVALUATION OF THE
REACH HOTLINE

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AN EVALUATION OF THE REACH HOTLINE

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Mike Pennock,
Executive Director

SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL OF HAMILTON AND DISTRICT

NEW ADDRESS:

**Social Planning and Research Council
of Hamilton and District**
255 West Avenue North
Hamilton, Ontario
L8L 5C8






THE SOCIAL PLANNING AND RESEARCH COUNCIL
OF HAMILTON AND DISTRICT

255 West Avenue North
Hamilton, Ontario. L8L 5C8

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INTRODUCTION

The REACH Hotline was established by the Regional Employment Adjustment Committee of Hamilton-Wentworth for the purpose of improving access to services for individuals "...who might otherwise have difficulty in obtaining information with respect to labour adjustment services". The Hotline is jointly operated by the Regional Municipality of Hamilton-Wentworth and Canada Employment and Immigration Commission.

The Hotline commenced operation on December 3, 1991 and operates from 8:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m., Monday through Friday, with an answering machine for recording off-hour calls. One full-time staff person was hired to provide the service.

Funding for the Hotline was provided on a trial basis by Employment and Immigration Canada with substantial in-kind assistance from the Regional Social Services Department.

The purpose of this report is to provide the results of an initial evaluation of the service and to identify structural issues related to the future organization of the Hotline.

METHODOLOGY

The evaluation was based upon statistical information which was collected and maintained by the Hotline staff, including the results from follow-up calls which were placed to a proportion of individuals calling the service.

Face sheets were completed for all incoming calls and entered into a micro-computer which was available to the program staff. The program utilized Lotus 1.2.3 for this purpose. Lotus 1.2.3 did not allow for the type of analysis that was required for the evaluation and, consequently, data from all of the face sheets was re-entered at the Social Planning and Research Council, utilizing the SPSS-PC statistical package. The results from the follow-up calls were incorporated into the SPRC database in a manner that allowed the individual call-back reports to be linked with the appropriate face sheets. The data was then analyzed to examine a number of key issues:

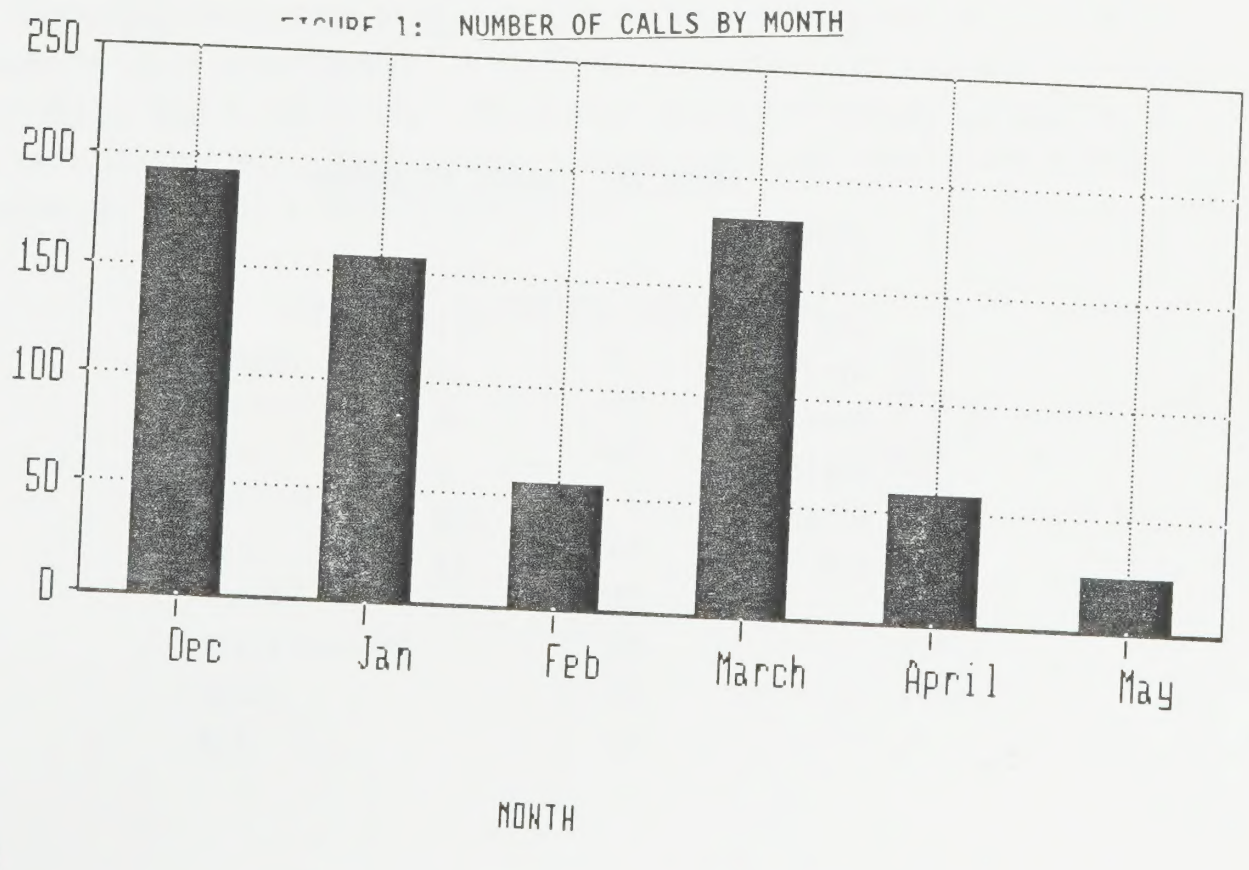
1. Patterns of Utilization: Do the utilization numbers justify an ongoing investment of resources in a Hotline?
2. Target Group Analysis: What are the characteristics of persons using the Hotline and to what extent are these characteristics "typical" of unemployed persons in Hamilton-Wentworth? To what extent were these callers already connected to the system of services?
3. Outcome Analysis: To what extent did callers initiate changes, following their contact with the Hotline with respect to employment, training or contacting agencies. What kind of clients were most successful in gaining employment or accessing training opportunities?

PATTERNS OF UTILIZATION

The number of calls per month for the period December 1991 to May 1992 fluctuated dramatically (see Figure 1). Initial high levels of demand in December and January fell off dramatically in February before rising again in March, as a result of special marketing initiatives. The numbers declined again in April and May.

The volume of calls appears to be directly related to the intensity of marketing initiatives, staff estimate that the capacity of the program is approximately 200 calls per month, and consequently, for three months of program operation, the utilization rates were less than 29% (percent). During one month, it fell to a low of 12% (percent).

It appears, therefore, that the ongoing operation of the program is difficult to justify unless it is accompanied by ongoing marketing efforts to maintain a high level of visibility within the target group.



TARGET GROUP ANALYSIS

At the time of the analysis, data was available for 627 callers who contacted the Hotline between December 1991 and April 1992. Sixty-seven percent of the callers were male and 29.3% were female. Ninety-three percent were residents of Hamilton-Wentworth.

Over half of the callers were below the age of 34 (Table I) and almost 60% were in receipt of either Unemployment Insurance or Welfare at the time of their call (Table II).

TABLE I: AGE OF CALLER

<u>Age</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
15 - 24	123	19.6
25 - 34	203	32.4
35 - 44	151	24.1
45 - 54	101	16.1
55 - 64	41	6.5
65+	2	0.3
N/A	6	1.0

TABLE II: SOURCE OF INCOME

<u>Source</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
UIC	227	36.2
GWA	129	20.6
Severance	36	5.7
Pension	10	1.6
Employment	8	1.3
Other	189	30.1
N/A	28	4.5

With respect to education, the largest group of callers (47.8%) reported Grade 12 with no post-secondary training or education (Table III). Only four percent reported an education level of Grade 8 or less. This may be indicative of under-utilization by individuals at the lower end of the educational spectrum. In 1986, 17.1% of the adult population in Hamilton-Wentworth reported educational attainment of less than Grade 9 and, although local figures are not available, national studies of the current recession indicate that unemployment rates among the unskilled have risen dramatically.

TABLE III: EDUCATION

<u>Education</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Below 9	24	3.8
9 - 11	141	22.5
12	300	47.8
College	73	11.6
University	79	12.6
N/A	10	1.6

The largest proportion of callers (64.1%) reported lay-offs or closures as the cause of their unemployment. A much smaller number reported that they had quit (7.8%) or been fired (6.1%). Ten percent were still working at the time of their call (Table IV). Twenty-seven percent indicated that their previous employment had been in a unionized position.

TABLE IV: REASON FOR TERMINATION

<u>Reason</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Closure	48	7.7
Layoff	354	56.5
Retired	5	0.8
Quit	49	7.8
Fired	38	6.1
Still working	59	9.4
Other	26	4.1
N/A	48	7.7

Half of the respondents indicated that their most recent employment had been less than two years in duration (Table V). Twenty percent had been employed for more than five years.

TABLE V: DURATION OF EMPLOYMENT

<u>Duration</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Less than 3 years		50.0
3 - 5 years		14.4
5 - 10 years		7.0
10+ years		12.3
N/A		16.3

The largest proportion of the callers (30%) had been employed in manufacturing industries (Table VI), followed by "other service industries (19%)". With respect to "most recent occupation", thirty-four percent of the callers reported processing, machining, product fabricating and construction trades (Table VII). The majority of callers, therefore, were "white collar" workers, with the largest proportions in managerial/administration (12.8%), clerical (9.9%) and sales (9.6%).

TABLE VI: MOST RECENT INDUSTRY

<u>Industrial Grouping</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Primary	14	2.2
Manufacturing	188	30.0
Construction	58	9.3
Transportation	54	8.6
Trade	24	3.8
Finance	30	4.8
Government	39	6.2
Other Service	119	19.0
N/A	101	16.1

TABLE VII: MOST RECENT OCCUPATION

<u>Occupational Grouping</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Managerial, administrative	80	12.8
Teaching and related	18	2.9
Medicine and health	7	1.1
Technological	49	7.8
Clerical and related	62	9.9
Sales	60	9.6
Service	34	5.4
Processing	81	12.9
Machining/Product Fabricating	68	10.8
Construction trades	67	10.7
Transportation	33	5.3
Other	20	3.2
N/A	48	7.7

OUTCOME ANALYSIS

The callers were referred to a variety of services (Table VIII), most frequently to information or educational programs:

TABLE VIII: REFERRALS SERVICE

	<u>%</u>
Canada Employment Centre	91.5
St. Charles Centre	90.6
Hamilton Public Library	90.3
Continuing Education	89.2
Hamilton Board of Education	88.7
Mohawk College	83.7
Adult Basic Education Hotline	83.3
Hamilton Help Centre	70.2
General Welfare Assistance	62.0
Employment Awareness Project	38.3
Youth Employment Centre	17.1
Citizen Action Group	12.1
Worker Education Centre	7.7
Ministry of Skills Development	6.9
Industrial Adjustment Services	1.6
Office of Labour Adjustment	1.3

Of the 93 callers who received follow-up calls, fifty-seven percent (N=53) reported that they had followed through on the referral, most frequently to the Hamilton Help Centre.

TABLE IX: AGENCY CONTACTED BY CALLER

<u>Agency</u>	<u>%</u>
Hamilton Help Centre	36.6
Canada Employment Centre	7.5
Citizen Action Group	5.4
Mohawk College	5.4
St. Charles Centre	5.4
Ministry of Skills Development	2.2
Employment Awareness Program	2.2
General Welfare Assistance	2.2
Hamilton Public Library	1.1

At the time of the follow-up call, twenty-seven percent reported that they were working and twenty-one percent indicated that they were involved with some type of training/education program. Forty-three percent were still looking for work.

It was notable that 48% of the call-back respondents reported some change in their status, subsequent to their call to the Hotline. Although it is not possible to ascribe these effects to the Hotline, the results can be viewed as positive. It is also notable that the largest proportion of callers actually contacted direct service agencies (Hamilton Help Centre, Canada Employment Centre and Citizen Action Group) despite the fact that the largest proportion of referrals were made to educational/training programs. This suggests that the callers were more interested in obtaining employment than in receiving upgrading at the time of their call.

To examine the relationship between disposition and the personal characteristics of the callers, a series of cross-tabulations were generated, based on the responses of the 93 call-backs.

As a result of the relatively small numbers involved, a number of the data categories were collapsed to produce more general categorizations of the responses. The results of this analysis are presented on Table X.

TABLE X: CORRELATES OF DISPOSITION

	<u>Working</u>	<u>Looking For Work</u>	<u>Training</u>	<u>Other</u>
<u>Contact Agencies</u>				
Yes	20.8	56.3	22.9	-
No	38.7	35.5	22.6	3.2
<u>Most Recent Employment</u>				
Secondary	44.9	42.6	11.8	0.7
Tertiary	40.1	42.0	18.0	-
<u>Most Recent Occupation</u>				
Managerial, Administrative	45.9	39.9	14.6	-
Clerical/Sales/Service	20.4	55.5	18.5	5.6
Processing/Machining/ Construction/Transportation	23.4	55.6	21.0	-
<u>Education</u>				
Less than grade 11	38.9	37.5	20.9	2.8
Grade 12	21.9	56.3	21.9	-
College/University	37.9	34.3	27.9	-
<u>Age</u>				
15 - 24	33.3	40.0	26.7	-
25 - 44	33.4	41.5	23.5	1.9
45+	41.9	43.7	14.4	-
<u>Source of Income</u>				
UIC	26.7	50.0	23.3	-
GWA	17.6	35.3	41.2	5.9
Other	39.6	51.4	9.0	-
<u>Gender</u>				
Male	26.8	48.2	25.0	-
Female	37.5	37.5	20.8	4.2

Contact with agencies, subsequent to their call, did not have any positive impact on their likelihood of obtaining employment or securing training opportunities. In fact, people who did not contact agencies were almost twice as likely to be working at the time of the follow-up as those that did contact agencies. This may be due to a "screening factor" - individuals who were able to use their personal resources to locate employment had little need for agency services. Consequently, the people who contact agencies are those whose employability is limited by their lack of personal resources.

General classifications of their most recent employment sector had little effect on their outcome related to locating employment or training. Occupation, however, did appear to have some effect insofar as people from managerial/administrative background were almost twice as likely to find employment as people from clerical/sales or blue collar occupations.

People with Grade 12 education were less likely than people with either more or less education to find work. There was little effect on training disposition.

People on General Welfare Assistance (GWA) at the time of their call were less likely to be working, and much more likely to be involved in training at the time of the follow-up.

Females were somewhat more likely to find work than males.

Older workers were somewhat more likely to have found work and less likely to have entered training than younger workers.

The reason for calling had relatively little impact on outcomes.

One of the key issues related to the evaluation of the REACH Hotline refers to the status of the callers. The Hotline was established to provide an opportunity for persons who "had fallen through cracks" to contact services. The success in attaining this objective, therefore, is based upon the extent to which callers were not in contact with services at the time of placing their call.

The majority of the callers (56.7%) were recipients of either UIC or GWA at the time of their call. A smaller number (14.7%) were involved with other components of the service system:

TABLE XI: STATUS OF CALLER

<u>Service</u>	<u>#</u>	<u>%</u>
Hamilton Help Centre	27	4.3
Mohawk College	19	3.0
St. Charles Centre	10	1.6
Transitions	8	1.2
Hamilton Public Library	4	0.6
Employment Awareness Project	4	0.6
Youth Employment Centre	3	0.5
Board of Education	3	0.5
Futures	2	0.4
Sheridan College	2	0.4
OBS	2	0.4
Others	8	1.2

In combination, a total of 63% of the callers were in contact with either the income maintenance system or an employment/educational service. Conversely, in 37% of the cases, the call to the Hotline represented a first-time call.

CONCLUSIONS

The primary problem experienced by the Hotline during its first five months of operation appeared to be one of maintaining visibility in the community on a consistent basis through ongoing marketing efforts. During months when the extent of active marketing was reduced, the number of callers fell to a level which raises serious concerns about the cost-effectiveness of the program.

During periods of time when marketing was enhanced, the total number of callers were between eighty and ninety percent of the estimated program capacity. It appears, therefore, that the Hotline should only be continued if provisions are made for the degree of marketing which appears to be necessary to maintain suitable utilization levels.

Although detailed descriptions of the unemployed population are not available for Hamilton-Wentworth, the results suggest that the callers were broadly representative of the population requiring service, with the possible exception of persons at the lower end of the educational spectrum. The utilization rate of persons with less than a Grade 8 education was lower than expected. This would suggest that future marketing efforts should give higher priority to informing this group about the existence of the service.

In general, the Hotline appeared to be successful in reaching clients who were not yet in contact with employment and training resources. Although the majority of callers were involved with either the General Welfare Assistance or Unemployment Insurance, these services are not able to offer the kind of comprehensive assessment of referral which is available through the Hotline. It appears, therefore, that the Hotline is complementary to these services rather than duplicative.

A significant proportion of the callers were working or in training programs at the time of the follow-up call. Although these effects cannot be directly ascribed to the Hotline, they are consistent with the outcomes that were expected of the Hotline.

STRUCTURAL CONSIDERATIONS

The Hotline was located in the same premises as the Employment Assistance Plan as a free-standing service during the pilot phase of its operation. If it is to be continued on a longer-term basis, consideration should be given to merging the service with an ongoing program. The Employment Assistance Program was funded on an interim basis due to extensive social assistance caseloads and the ongoing status of this program is uncertain.

The choice of an appropriate host service for the Hotline is complicated by the fact that the current structure of services could undergo major changes in future. The future development of community-based Ontario Training and Adjustment Boards (OTAB) and the imminent identification of a local broker for the new of provincial, Jobs Ontario program.

In general, a number of options are available:

1. Locating the Hotline in an existing service agency or training program (i.e. Hamilton Help Centre and Mohawk College).
2. Attaching the Hotline to an existing income maintaining service (i.e. GWA).
3. Attaching the Hotline to an existing information and referral service (Adult Basic Education Hotline or the Skills Source program at the Hamilton Public Library).
4. Attaching the Hotline to the broker agency for the Jobs Ontario program.
5. Identifying a temporary host to sponsor the Hotline until such a time as the local training and adjustment board is established.

In deciding upon a suitable sponsor for the Hotline, a number of key criteria should be considered:

- a. The ability of the host to market the program to individuals who are not currently involved with employment training service.
- b. The cost of the service provision.
- c. The need to avoid duplication with other hotlines and information service.

- d. The avoidance of conflict-of-interest concerns by the sponsoring organization in referral activities.
- e. The existing profile of the organization in the community.

These criteria and any others that are thought to be applicable should be prioritized by the Regional Employment Adjustment Committee and utilized as part of a process which involves the submission of tenders from interested organizations if the committee decides to recommend ongoing funding for the Hotline.

